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ABSTRACT

This guide is an evaluation that can help one answer relevant questions about improving a reading or language arts program such as: Are there changes that need to be made? Is a stronger commitment needed to strengths identified in the program? and Are specific resources needed to make it more successful? The manual points out that if an improved program is wanted, it is imperative that it be examined inclusively--beyond just reading the scores from tests administered. Following an overview, the text is organized into sections for each of the steps in the evaluation process: Step 1: Clarifying what it is that you and others want to know; Step 2: Deciding where and how to get the information--targeting the data; Step 3: Designing and conducting the study--implementing the evaluation; and Step 4: Reporting to the people who need to know what you have found. These are four major activities one can pursue in planning an evaluation. The suggestions offered for planning an effective assessment might seem sequential but they should be interwoven in a way that allows each decision made, in planning the evaluation, to inform others. These four activities may seem linear, but, in reality, the general steps proposed are interactive, similar to the language abilities that are most likely to develop from this program evaluation. (Contains a 17-item annotated bibliography and planning worksheets.) (NKA)

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A Guide for

Evaluating a Reading or Language Arts Program

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2

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A Guide for

Evaluating a Reading or Language Arts Program

Table of Contents

Section	*Page*
Overview	*1*
Step 1: Clarifying what it is that you and others want to know	*3*
Step 2: Deciding where and how to get the information: targeting the data	*9*
Step 3: Designing and conducting the study: implementing the evaluation	*14*
Step 4: Reporting to the people who need to know what you have found	*21*
Annotated Bibliography of Sources for Further Information	*25*
Planning Worksheets	

A Guide for Evaluating a Reading or Language Arts Program

Overview

There are many reasons for evaluating educational outcomes. Some evaluations are guided by specific questions that rely primarily on traditional test scores: Is a particular reading program effective, for example. The overall reason for evaluating a reading or language arts *program*, however, is to find out how things are going:

- Are there any changes that need to be made?
- Is a stronger commitment needed to strengths identified in the program?
- Are specific resources needed to make it more successful?

This guide is about evaluation that can help you answer relevant questions about improving a reading or language arts program. Planning such an evaluation begins with some fairly broad considerations. If you want to conduct an evaluation that can help your program improve, it is imperative that you take a more inclusive look at it—beyond just reading the scores from tests you administer.

This guide is organized into five sections: An overview section that introduces the evaluation approach is followed by a section for each of the steps in the evaluation process described in this first section. Several blackline masters are included at the end of the guide for you to use in getting your evaluation underway. These can be modified to match your specific needs. An annotated bibliography is also included to guide you to additional evaluation suggestions.

There is nothing wrong with highly targeted test-score evaluations. An analysis of many evaluations of teaching reading and the language arts indicates that a majority of them were narrowly focused, and more often than not, they relied almost solely on test scores. They were not, however, what can be called *program* evaluations. Program evaluations go beyond scores and descriptively reveal strengths worth supporting and intensifying, and weaknesses to be eliminated. Most importantly, they can clearly indicate how to go about doing that.

Wider-ranging evaluations that can inform good educational decision-making require a mix of different data types and some planning. Besides test scores from "right-answer" tests, an evaluation can gather rich information from a variety of other

evaluation methodologies, including alternative performance-based assessments, observations, surveys, and interviews.

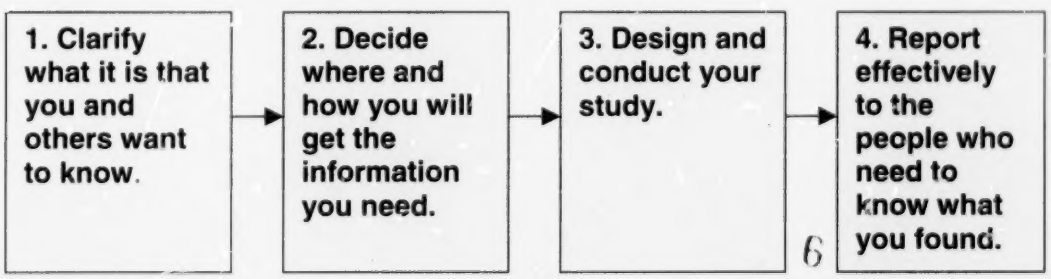
Attention to the audiences interested in your evaluation will help you decide what questions you want answered. A consideration of where you can get those answers will tell you which methodologies you can use. Many who are interested in the evaluation of your language arts or reading program will need the standardized or criterion-referenced test scores to be satisfied. But these data that they look on as "objective" can be enriched with a broader array of important and relevant information. Using a broad range of information is the only way that some important questions and issues can be addressed.

This is particularly true in evaluating language arts and reading programs. They are designed to develop the ability to think and solve problems by using the skills and strategies of reading, writing, listening and speaking. We do this with some purpose for using the language—even if it is simply to enjoy ourselves. All good theory on the use and development of language tells us that it is interactive in this way.

We want our programs to teach children to use language more effectively in valid and authentic ways that will serve them in and outside of school. Whether we are succeeding cannot be adequately described just with test scores. Language use, our educational goals, and the programs we use to achieve them tend to defy clean statistical description; and rich, more authentic data sources are needed to validly depict them.

Gathering the kinds of information for your evaluation requires some initial thinking and brainstorming. The suggestions offered here for planning an effective evaluation might seem sequential, but actually they should be interwoven in a way that allows each decision you make in planning the evaluation to inform the others. It seems linear and is most neatly explained in that way here, but in reality, the general steps proposed are interactive—just like the language abilities we want to develop.

These, then, are four major activities you can pursue in planning your evaluation:


1. Clarify what it is that you and others want to know.
2. Decide where and how you will get the information you need.
3. Design and conduct your study.
4. Report effectively to the people who need to know what you found.

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Step 1: Clarifying what it is that you and others want to know: Rationalizing your study

By brainstorming about what you want to learn, you can clarify and begin to organize the questions that you will attempt to answer. You will be considering who will want to know what, that is, identifying the audiences for your study and their needs. In a word, you will be rationalizing the study; and the result will be very helpful when you set out to explain to teachers, the public, and others why you are evaluating the program. Quite simply, Step 1 looks like this:

STEP 1	**Clarify what it is that you and others want to know: rationalize your study.**	**Basic activities:** • Write questions about things you want to know. • Ask teachers, parents, others what they want to find out. • Group the questions.	**Who can do this best:** You and your staff will probably want to do this, but audiences you identify will play an important role.

The focus in this initial step is to target what needs to be learned and to state that in questions as clearly and simply as possible. Many evaluators prefer to structure these as decisions that they feel need to be made and by listing the options that they have in deciding. That more deductive approach tends to preclude *discovering* options as answers, but the inductive approach of more open-ended questioning can get somewhat unwieldy for one study.

Even so, it is a good idea to be expansive and open in this step and to consider a full range of questions. Later, if you have too many questions for a single evaluation effort, you might need to select the most important questions in order to focus your efforts, or to plan several studies. Or—since evaluation is a normal task for educators—you may be seeking answers to good questions about your program on a continual basis.

Generating Good Questions

Begin by brainstorming your own questions, which are apt to begin with, and grow out of, the first: "How well are we doing with our language arts/reading program?" Then talk to your teachers, parents, and other audiences who will be interested in the information you produce. Find out what their questions are and merge them with your list.

Below are some samples of the kinds of questions that should focus your study. Most of the questions will fall into several groups similar to the four groups below.

General Questions about Language Performance and Reading Habits

- How well are our students learning? How well do they read and write?
- Do our students improve significantly in our program? Is our investment in the program paying dividends? Are we getting our tax dollar's worth? Is our investment in the program paying reasonable dividends?
- How much and how often do our students read and write? What kinds of reading and writing do they do? Do they use reading and writing effectively throughout the curriculum? Are we motivating them to become more effective language users?
- How much of our students' language development takes place in school? How much in the classroom? How much at home? Is there any indication that parents are aware of language growth? Do they report increased reading at home?
- How heavily used are our school libraries? What kinds of language use are indicated by the use made of our libraries?
- How interactive are reading and writing and the other language behaviors in our instruction? For example, does reading instruction generate student writing?

Availability of Materials

- Are there adequate instructional materials and free reading materials available to our students? Do teachers and students have the support materials they need? How extensively are the materials that are available used?
- Do our school libraries have adequate copies of the trade book selections recommended in the program we are using?
- Do our schools provide the resources to integrate the language arts program with the music, art, and other activities suggested in the program? Is it relatively easy for the teachers and students to follow up with activities suggested by and selected from the program?

Teacher/Instructional Influences and Concerns

- Have our teachers been adequately introduced to teaching concepts and techniques that could make the program more effective? How do the in-service opportunities we offer tie into the program?
- Have the teacher resource materials accompanying the program been made fully available to the teachers? How frequently are they used?
- What opportunities do our teachers have to consult about problems and to ask questions related to the program?
- What kinds of assessments are used in our schools and classrooms? How closely and in what ways is assessment of language development linked to instruction? What assessments provided by the program are made available to and used by our teachers? Is any emphasis we are placing on alternative assessment giving teachers a better handle on instructional decision-making?
- How well does individual teaching fit into the stated goals of our curriculum and the program? How are these goals structured across grades? How much attention do our teachers pay to this structuring? What influence have teachers had on setting program goals? Do they feel involved?

Parental Concerns and Influences

- What evidence is there of an increased parental role in the language development of our students? What can be identified as contributing to the impact of parents? Are parents of our students reading to their sons and daughters? Do they read things that their children write? Do parent-child discussions of the ideas involved in what students read and write take place with much frequency?
- Are materials available in the program provided to teachers, and how often do they use them? What kinds of information about the language arts/reading program and the progress of their children do parents receive? Do they, for example, get reading lists appropriate for their sons and daughters?

- What opportunities has our program provided for parents to learn about the language development of their children? Do they get to contribute to a better understanding of that development?

It is important to re-emphasize that these are merely *samples* of the kinds of questions you may consider in Step 1. This is neither a complete list of the questions you could articulate nor a checklist to be applied. Your brainstormed list may be longer than the one above, which is probably longer than the final list you will use to focus your study. Your initial list of questions can be pared down to focus on the most relevant and important. Five or six key questions may be all that you want to pursue in an initial evaluation, but don't limit the brainstorming as you get started. Let the list get long. You can synthesize, eliminate redundancies, and cut back later.

You may decide that some of the questions above are important and match the needs of your staff and/or administration. You may have many others that are different and relative to your schools and your program. You may realize already that the study you want to conduct cannot answer everything that you might be interested in asking about your program. Still, free-wheeling and grouping questions in the list is what leads you to that decision and can help you prioritize and select the most important ones and ones that you can reasonably answer.

As you do this, you will see reasons to combine some of them. You may discover questions you feel you have misplaced in the wrong category. You may identify questions that are essentially the same that appear in two different general categories you have created and decide to seek the answer under only one so that the data which determine it will not have to be combined later. You may decide to rework your categories and your organization, so it becomes more evident how Steps 1 and 2 are interrelated.

Remember that the sample questions above are ones that could grow out of considering the information needs of a variety of audiences. The table below demonstrates how just a few of the questions can serve those needs.

Audience	Pertinent Question	Possible Applications of the Answer
Board of Education Media Administrators Legislators	Are our schools effective? Are our children reading better? Is society getting its tax dollar's worth?	Increase funds to support identified strengths, to shore up weak spots; review curriculum; raise teacher qualifications; become better informed about programs and their objectives.
General Public	How well do our children read? How much do they read?	Promote library collections/circulation; read more to children at home; support reading activities in school; pressure for more teacher aides.
Principals	Do reading and language instruction in my school contribute to making better citizens?	Promote activities that develop thinking and articulation of social consciousness. Recognize articulate students; create opportunities for communication on real issues across grades, between schools, between home and school.
Teachers	What aspects of my instruction are deemed most successful?	Create more opportunities in the program to apply teacher strengths; seek more support in time and materials; challenge and perfect other techniques that seem less productive; promote an awareness of other activities that seem under-appreciated; lobby for more opportunities for student experience with reading and language.
Parents	Is my child going to be more successful because of current instruction?	Press for instruction with applications to the student's life. Seek advice on how to enlarge opportunities at home.

Relating Your Questions to Decisions to Be Made

Note that the question samples listed above can grow out of decisions that you have already identified as ones that need to be made. The table below gives samples of how that can work.

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Decision to be made	Relevant question
You must decide whether to use a performance assessment in addition to—or in lieu of—one of the standardized tests you regularly administer.	How well do performance assessments inform our teaching? How well do audiences interested in accountability accept those results? Which published tests are good matches for the program materials we use?
You must decide whether to fund and budget system-wide an expansion of a volunteer tutorial program that has been piloted at a few schools.	Has the experimental program had any discernable impact on the reading and writing behavior of the students in the pilot schools? How well did it mesh with the regular program and its materials?
There is pressure from a group of teachers to incorporate portfolio assessment into your accountability formula; another group opposes this, saying it will eliminate the students' sense of portfolio ownership.	How are our teachers using portfolios? How many use them? How does the methodology serve their instruction? How different would the portfolios their students keep be if they were submitted to evaluators? How would that impact portfolio use in the classroom? Is there a way to meet both needs?
There is a request to fund a desktop publishing system for each school in the district.	What impact are classroom publications having on student language development?

With the answers to the questions relevant to the decision to be made, you can line out your options more completely and clearly than you could have expressed them before asking the question.

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Step 2: Deciding where and how to get the information: Targeting the data

The way that the four steps for planning and conducting an evaluation are interlocked and interact becomes clearer at this point. Step 2 involves deciding where you can get the information and how to go after it. You will soon discover that many of your audiences are your sources as well. Some of your sources are, in fact, the assessments themselves. And having determined whom to ask and how to ask it, you have actually done a major part of Step 3: Implementing the study. The procedure involved in Step 2 looks like this:

STEP 2	**Deciding where and how to get the information: targeting the data**	**Basic activities:** • Identify your sources: Who has the information to answer particular questions you want to ask? • Select the assessments you will use (the ways you will collect information).	**Who can do this best:** Again you and your staff may need to make these decisions, but consult with your sources and with experts if need be.

The two major considerations of this step flow quite logically.

Identifying Your Sources

Take a look at each question you would like to ask in your evaluation. Who has the information to answer it? Many questions you may articulate for an evaluation can be answered by more than one source, and when that is the case, a good evaluation will seldom rely on just one. In general, the sources that can inform your questions are fairly obvious. The planning table below exemplifies this using only a few questions to make the point. You can create a similar, more complete table for the questions selected for your evaluation study.

When you are finished, you should regroup your questions by probable data sources. This will help you with the second major activity in Step 2. With each question is a shorter tag that will be used in a following table to illustrate how question/source combinations are matched to types of information gathering and information.

Possible Questions	Information Source
How much reading are our students doing outside of school? (Outside Reading)	Students, parents, librarians, portfolios
How receptive are different evaluation audiences of portfolio assessment? (Portfolio Acceptance)	Media representatives, administrators, parents, education critics
How well does the performance of our students compare to students in other school systems? (Comparisons)	Norm-referenced tests / performance assessment
How well are our students meeting state and local standards? (Competency)	Criterion-referenced tests / performance assessment
How well do our students apply what they read? (Application)	Performance assessment; teachers; parents
How aware are our students of their own language use and development? (Self-assessment)	Portfolio assessment; teachers; students; parents
How competent are our students with language mechanics? (Mechanics)	Norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests; portfolios; performance assessment; teachers
What do our students read by choice? (Reading Choice)	Students, parents, librarians, teachers

Selecting the Assessments (the Ways You Will Collect Information)

The assessments that you use to collect the information are extremely important. Don't make the mistake of concluding that one assessment will do the job. Neither should you administer a variety of assessments just for the sake of variety. Each assessment must be selected to the extent that it provides the information you need.

In selecting assessments remember that an assessment is not necessarily a test. An assessment is a means of collecting information. Interviews, surveys, observations, and reviews of materials are all considered assessments because they are each a means of collecting information.

The list below provides some idea of the wide variety of information collection strategies and assessments that are available to you. Check the references at the end of this booklet for explanations of other assessments.

- **Norm-referenced assessments:** These tests have been standardized, and the scores are used to compare students to those in the norming population. Norm-referenced tests are useful as general indicators of achievement. Most norm-referenced tests use multiple-choice items. However, a number of nationally standardized tests have now added student written responses.
- **Criterion-referenced assessments:** These tests often look very similar to norm-referenced tests. However, they are more closely focused on the objectives used to design the tests. Criterion-referenced tests are used to determine how well students have achieved specific objectives--without concern about how other students perform. The focus on comparison to a criterion rather than other students (norms) is the primary difference between norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests.
- **Writing assessments:** Many states and school districts administer writing assessments in which students are asked to write in response to a given problem, topic, or even picture. Some writing assessments allow students to engage in pre-writing and revising while others ask students to produce just a single draft. Scoring of writing assessments takes several forms including single scores or diagnostic scores of various aspects of writing as mechanics and content. There are no norm-referenced writing assessments. All of the writing assessments are compared to anchor papers or model responses. Thus, all writing assessments would fall under the more general category of criterion-referenced assessment.
- **Performance assessments:** Performance assessments take many forms and are always criterion referenced. The major focus of most performance assessments is the application of knowledge. The goal is to determine if a student can solve a problem by using what he or she knows.
- **Portfolio assessments:** Portfolios are used in the classroom to encourage students to collect work samples so they can talk with their teachers about ways of improving. Show portfolios are selected samples of work completed over a period of time to demonstrate student growth and development.

- **Work samples:** All kinds of samples of student activities fall under this category. Work samples are collected in much the same way as portfolios. Indeed, portfolios could be considered collections of work samples.
- **Interviews:** Interviews, especially those that are more loosely structured, allow for a discussion of a range of topics. The interactive nature of an interview allows issues and concerns to develop rather than merely responding to a structured list, as would be the case with a survey or questionnaire.
- **Surveys and Questionnaires:** These provide a means to collect information and reactions on specific topics from a large sample. Open-ended responses can be included on a questionnaire or survey, but most of them are structured by a list of issues. Surveys and questionnaires look simple to develop and use. However, the development of a survey questionnaire that will produce valid results is a difficult task.
- **Observations:** Observations can be structured or unstructured, but they should be focused by issues or concerns. Classroom observations should be more than merely watching a class or teacher. Observations in a classroom, school library, or hallway can provide useful information about reading habits and attitudes. Good observations need to be planned and discussed so that those being observed do not believe they are a means of checking-up.
- **Checklists:** Checklists can be used as a means of quickly and efficiently recording information during an interview or observation.
- **Others:** There are a number of data collection procedures to determine reading levels, writing strategies, and language skill development. These include such assessments as running records, oral think-along assessments, retrospective discussions of writing strategies, reading miscue analyses, and cloze tests.

The above list should not be considered inclusive, nor should you attempt to use as many of these approaches as possible. The list is provided merely to remind you that there are numerous ways to collect information--numerous ways to assess. The selection of specific assessments should be determined by the questions in your evaluation plans and the information you think you need to answer those questions.

The form of assessment used can be determined by a number of factors. Obviously, the question you are asking is the primary one; and the sources you have identified for answering it also suggest which ways you can gather your information.

The match, then, of question/source combinations to assessment types can be considered in planning as it is in the next table, in which the tags for the question/source combination refer to the previous table where the questions are matched to possible sources for their answers.

Question/Source Combination	Evaluation Assessments That Would Serve
Outside Reading/Students, Parents, Librarians, Portfolios	Surveys, Interviews, Portfolio Analysis, Observation
Portfolio Acceptance/Media representatives, Administrators, Parents, Education Critics	Interviews, Surveys, Educator Observation
Comparisons/[tests/student performance]	Norm-referenced, Criterion-referenced, and/or Performance Assessments
Competency/[tests/student performance]	Criterion-referenced, Performance Assessments; Show Portfolio Assessment; Writing Assignments
Application/[tests], Teachers, Students	Performance Assessments, Interviews (including teacher Observation), Surveys, Portfolio Assessment, Writing Assignments, Think-Alongs
Self-assessment/Portfolios, Teachers, Students, Parents	Portfolio Assessment, Interviews, Surveys, Observation, Think-Alongs
Mechanics/[tests], Portfolios, Performance Assessment, Teachers	Norm- or Criterion-referenced Assessments, Portfolio Assessment, Performance Assessments, Interviews, Writing Assignments
Reading Choice/Students, Parents, Librarians, Teachers	Surveys, Interviews (about Observation), Check Lists

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Step 3: Designing and conducting the study: implementing the evaluation

Actually, you have been designing the study from the time you began thinking about it. What remains is to select from the possibilities you have identified: Which questions do you intend to ask? What sources will you rely on for the information? What assessment types will you use? In effect, you are polishing, specifying, and refining the work you have done in Steps 1 and 2.

There are other organizational details that may be important, depending on the scope of your evaluation. You can set a schedule to accomplish everything you will do and assign responsibilities for each task within some chain of command. You will need to acquire or develop the instruments you need, and you may decide to pilot your design and any instruments you have created, revising if and as the piloting recommends.

Then, of course, comes the heart of the matter—the job you have been getting ready to do: gathering, synthesizing, and interpreting the data collected to get at answers to your questions. Step 3 represents the bulk of your evaluation, and if you have completed the first two steps effectively, this one should go smoothly. Step 3 looks like this:

STEP 3	**Designing and conducting the study: implementing the evaluation**	**Basic activities:** • Specifying questions, sources, and assessments. • Scheduling the various parts of your evaluation. • Assigning responsibility for particular tasks and aspects of the study. • Acquiring or creating the assessments you need. • Piloting the plan and any assessments created; making any necessary revisions. • Gathering the information. • Synthesizing and interpreting the data gathered.	**Who can do this best:** You and your staff (including assessment specialists) and then the teachers and other volunteers who are assigned tasks, and often a particularly hard-working and dedicated committee to synthesize and interpret.

Specifying Questions, Sources, and Assessments

If your planning in Steps 1 and 2 has not led you to specifying which particular questions you want answered, who can give you those answers, and which assessments you can use to get them—that needs to be done before beginning the collection of data. The next table uses just three sample specific evaluation questions to illustrate the options you have for creating a rich database. In an evaluation plan at this stage, these questions would be grouped by source so that a single instrument—a survey administered to parents, for example—could gather information on numerous questions you want to ask parents. And some questions will be repeated across sources to acquire various available perspectives.

Initial Evaluation Plan for a School or School District Focused on Three Possible Evaluation Questions

Question	Source	Assessment (How to Collect)	Typical Tasks	Who Does It
1. How aware are parents of the goals of our program? How well do our goals match their concerns?	Parents, administrators, teachers	Survey, interview, questionnaire	Develop/write the questionnaire, Select parent sample to be surveyed, Administer questionnaire	Staff with the assistance of a volunteer parent committee
2. What kind of reading do our students do?	Librarians, parents, teachers, students	Interviews, surveys, questionnaire	Write protocol to guide interviewers, Identify interviewers, Select people to be interviewed, Conduct interviews, Synthesize results	Staff, teachers, volunteers, librarians, parents
3. How well do our children write?	Writing test, classroom work samples, show portfolios, classroom observations, performance assessment that includes writing	Selected writing test, portfolios, observations	Identify or create the writing assessment, Discuss work sample collections with teachers, Classroom observations, Scoring the writing tests, Analyzing work samples	Teachers, teacher committee

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This table, which moves from planning guideline toward implementation guide, begins to lay out the actual plans you would need to develop.

Note these other things about this example:

- A survey questionnaire administered to parents could easily seek answers to other questions you have, as long as it does not overburden the parent filling it out.
- The answer to question 2 would probably be sought from other sources, as well as from librarians. Some of those, such as parents, might be surveyed. Library records might be an excellent source as well. Remember that the table above is only an example to demonstrate how you can go about fleshing out your plans for your evaluation.
- Another source of the answer to question 3 could be the parent and/or student surveys. Students are usually fair and honest in their appraisal of such things as the amount and kind of writing they are doing. Some students do a great deal of writing outside of school, often associated with clubs and hobbies. Others do very little. Your evaluation will be richer if you include these sources of information. Your particular program and situation will probably add a considerable amount of detail to this brief example.

Scheduling the Various Parts of Your Evaluation

At this point, or even before, you may have a time schedule of what will happen in your evaluation. It helps to have a master plan laid on a timetable that estimates how long each aspect of the study will take and attempts to schedule aspects of the study so that they fit together within a reasonable time frame. How long will each part of the study take? When should it be started so that the results are ready in time to be synthesized with the results of the other parts and to be interpreted for reporting?

Your study may answer a few vital questions in a matter of weeks, or it may be a more extensive evaluation that takes a longer period of time. Although it is hypothetical, and treats only a few aspects that an evaluation may include, the following chart attempts to demonstrate one way such a timetable can be structured.

Suppose, for the sake of illustration, that you have spent a spring semester and the summer planning your study, and your goal is to implement it in the following school

year. You would then conduct your analysis and synthesis during the following summer. The scheduling of the implementation might go something like the one below. *The graph is not offered as a model* but is meant only to demonstrate how such an overall time framework might help keep your study on schedule.

Your situation will dictate the exact timetable for your evaluation. It could easily take a full year if you decide to include a lot of your questions. However, by selecting a few questions to answer, your evaluation may require only a month or two. Using a visual aid like this timetable, however, allows everyone to track the progress of the evaluation.

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Assigning Responsibility for Particular Tasks

A clean operation always depends on everyone in a project knowing who is responsible for which task. You should know by name, each staff person, teacher, or volunteer who is to oversee each aspect of your study. The smaller the study is, of course, the more informal that arrangement can be. Larger evaluation efforts—particularly those that will be producing a variety of data types to be synthesized in order to answer some important questions—can profit from a chart or list of tasks with the names of who is responsible for each. Such organizing resources usually show whom each person reports to, so that information, questions, and problems can be channeled efficiently.

Who, for example, will gather together all of the data from different tests given at different times and at different grade levels? Who helps that person schedule the administration of the tests? At each school where testing is to be done, who will oversee it? Who will help the person responsible for the rating and analysis of show portfolios? Who will help the person overseeing the gathering of criterion-referenced test data compare and synthesize their findings?

Some responsibility charts are effectively combined with schedules and show just when particular participants in your study will be expected to play their roles.

Acquiring or Creating Needed Assessments

Basically this aspect of Step 3 is one of making sure that all the materials that participants of your study will need are available when they need them. Are there enough copies of the particular levels of tests that you will need on hand? Have you decided on assessments that must be created or modified from ones used in the past?

This aspect of your planning should also look at other ways of gathering information that you have decided to use. Are there guidelines and protocols to help people who will be doing interviewing and observing, so that what is gathered by different interviewers can be easily coordinated? Are the guidelines for the preparation of show portfolios clear and available to all teachers who will take part in that data collection? How about the guidelines for analyzing the portfolios or for rating performance assessments?

Finally, do you want to consider training sessions for any of the participants in your study to help assure that it is implemented evenly and effectively?

Piloting and Revising Your Plans and Assessments

The scope of evaluations can vary greatly. Yours need not be large to be valuable, and implementing whatever you do can be made a part of ongoing management. This can simplify concerns about responsibilities, for example, and it can simplify scheduling. If, however, the evaluation you are planning is larger, you might be interested in piloting aspects of your plans and trying out the ways of gathering information that you have selected.

Are the directions and protocols you have prepared for a team of observers going to generate the collection of similar data from each of them? Are the questions that have been prepared for interviewing parents or librarians effective? Will the team of volunteers rating performance assessments be able to follow the rubrics and anchor samples you give them and come up with reliable results?

This kind of piloting takes time—especially if you allow for revisions in your plans or assessments or procedures that the piloting recommends. So do not overburden yourself with this concern. If you can get it done, however, it makes sense to find out how good your plans and assessments are and how well they will work. Often this all-important step results in clarification and simplification that will make the data you collect far more useful, dependable, reliable, and valid.

Gathering and Synthesizing the Information

"Finally!" you may be inclined to exclaim. You are ready to begin your evaluation! But everyone who has been involved in designing and planning it will understand—with a conviction that can only come from involvement—that it has been underway for some time: Planning is an essential *part* of the study.

If you have planned and organized adequately, the administration of the various aspects of your evaluation should go according to your carefully sequenced time plan; and the arrival of the data should find its way to whoever is to synthesize and interpret it.

That task, again, is accomplished differently depending on the scope of your study. A single researcher, for example, could conceivably do it. Depending on how

high-stake the evaluation is—how many decisions will be made using its results—you may have arranged for the involvement of more individuals in this aspect of the study. You may have included representatives of different audiences as part of the team.

With the data in hand, whoever is doing your data analysis should go through the questions that survived to the final implementation and articulate answers where that is possible. The predominant ones are apt to be:

- How are we doing?
- What changes need to be made?
- What commitments need strengthening?
- Do we have the resources we need to improve?

You, your staff assigned to this task, volunteer committees, or whoever is doing this analysis should not force answers through questionable interpretations and need not fear the need to qualify findings in order to assure their credibility.

Ideally you will have outstanding and highly qualified individuals involved to summarize the answers as a descriptive report of the evaluation of your language arts or reading program. Accompanying this should be a set of recommendations that grows clearly out of the synthesized findings. It may be necessary—to maintain full credibility—to have a secondary set of findings and recommendations that seem somewhat "apparent" but are not endorsed by the study without any reservations.

Have ready a process of discussing and reviewing the findings of your study. Let those who conducted the analysis consider any challenges and recommendations for changes that emerge. The final task in the analysis should be to recommend a format for the final report on the evaluation to be written by competent staff persons.

Step 4: Reporting to the people who need to know what you have found: Satisfying the audiences

You have come to the point where you can report what you have learned about your program. You should be able to answer the predominant questions, as well as questions that are pertinent to particular audiences. You can address them all in a general report and plan to write specific reports with descriptions and recommendations for specific audiences, such as teachers, parents, librarians, and the students themselves.

The final stages of Step 3 have indicated how you can get to this point using committees, consultants, or whomever you think should be involved. It is worth stressing that it is a good idea to have members of the different audiences represented in the process, but the writing of what has been found does not have to done by committee. It can be delegated to a competent staff or volunteer writer, whose efforts are guided and carefully reviewed by those who hand analyzed the data and made the recommendations.

STEP 4	**Reporting to the people who need to know what you have found: satisfying the needs of the evaluation audiences**	**Basic activities:** • Outlining your findings. • Drafting an analysis of the whole database, reporting to particular audiences, and making recommendations. • Distributing a draft of the report so members of different audiences can react to it, and then revising and polishing it. • Making sure that your report is widely circulated and properly understood.	**Who can do this best:** The committees or other analysts who have synthesized and interpreted the data may select members to work as a writing team. Such a group may want to work with report-writing specialists on your staff, who will be responsible for the actual writing. Make sure you are prepared to offer assistance in the use of the document.

Outlining Your Findings

It always helps to have a sense of the whole—to be able to consider the different aspects of what you have found in an evaluation from a broader perspective that helps you keep a balance and to better understand how different findings may relate. The individuals who have been involved in synthesizing and analyzing the data have no doubt

already done that as they interpreted it and related it to the study's questions. They should play a major role in preparing the report. Having a better grasp on the data than anyone else, it should be relatively easy for them to outline what has been found. That outline may closely resemble the articulation and final organization of the questions before beginning data collection, or it might demonstrate how an inductive gathering of data information has provided new insight.

No attempt to exemplify how this may develop is suitable here. Your particular educational setting, the study you designed and the way it was designed, the questions you set out to answer, and other factors should make the emphases of your report unique. If one could predict even broadly what it would say, the evaluation would not be necessary. It is important, however, to refer back to the original questions that guided the evaluation.

Drafting a Broader Analysis, Reporting to Particular Audiences, and Making Recommendations

Ideally, the results of your study will support some interesting generalizations about your language arts or reading program. The first part of the report should explain these and be written for a general audience. These are the findings that are most apt to be summarized in the press, and that is appropriate because they should be articulated to reflect the balance of what was revealed across grade levels, schools, language behaviors, or other different units of the study. This does not mean that this part of the report will report no specifics about the findings. Rather, those kind of supportive and illustrative details are essential in each part of the report.

Reporting what can be generalized does not mean dwelling on innocuous generalizations. What you find out about your program from a broad perspective might be quite involved, reassuring, or disturbing. A certain number of the questions you pursued will relate to this wider scope, and what you found could be discussed in this section.

After taking this broad perspective, the study can treat what was learned in answering the questions that are of the most intense interest to particular audiences, like parents, then teachers, and the students themselves. These vital or vested particular interests may not have been obvious from the start of the study when the questions were

first grouped. They may have become obvious as the information-gathering procedures involving members of an audience proceeded.

Finally, the report should culminate—either overall—or section by section in meaningful and useful conclusions and recommendations that, acted upon, can bring about change and strengthen your program. Note that this does not necessarily mean identifying weaknesses; recommendations might very well call for more commitments to certain identified strengths.

With all of these suggestions, it is important to keep in mind that your audiences will be relying on the synthesis and analysis you have done. So your report should not be extensively long. It needs to focus on the key findings and contain succinct summaries. In short, it should be reader-friendly and easy for your audiences to understand.

Distributing a Draft for Reactions in Order to Revise

Once your report is finalized for distribution, you will want it to be enthusiastically received and treated as a reliable guide to improve your language arts or reading program. You have tried to ensure this trust in and acceptance of your study if you have involved members of all audiences in the evaluation process and by reporting for particular audience perspectives.

But there is a final step that will help assure this. Distribute the draft of the report (clearly and distinctively marked "DRAFT") to individuals in each audience who are willing to react to it. This should give you an indication of spots in the report that need to be clarified, or reworded. It could lead you to reconsider the appropriateness of the way the study data has been treated in the report, the validity of a recommendation, or whatever. The point of doing this is not to force changes on the findings but to make sure that the report of them is clear and fairly interpreted. The reason for doing it in draft form is to allow time to revise for accuracy and clarity.

Making Sure the Report Is Widely Circulated and Understood

The final draft of the report can have little impact beyond that the evaluation study itself had on participants unless it is read. It would be a shame to go through all the responsible planning and the careful implementation of the study and then fail to see that it is widely distributed in an attractive and engaging format. This involves more than

designing effectively and printing lots of copies. How will people get them? Equally important, how will members of your evaluation audience know that the study was conducted, that the report is ready and available, and that it holds something of potential interest to many of them?

Obviously you will need to publicize the report by making sure that the media knows about it. You can prepare special press releases which are, in effect, carefully and crisply written summaries to facilitate media attention. You can prepare press releases about the findings as a whole, and about other more specific findings and recommendations. You can distribute the findings in abbreviated form that catches one's interest and whets an interest in the full report. You, personally, may want to take numerous copies of it to the schools and to meetings of teachers and parents. You can encourage groups with potential interest in your program to hold discussion groups based on the report.

Finally, you can anticipate questions and reactions that people will have to the report and prepare extended analyses for personal presentations. Your staff and a volunteer group could prepare to do this. If you are not able to anticipate reactions, listen for them and identify aspects of the study and/or report that can be clarified by joining teachers, parents, or other interested parties in their discussion of your study's findings.

Annotated Bibliography

Affierbach, Peter *et al.* (1994). Involving students in assessing their reading: The winter count. *The Reading Teacher, 48*, (1), 80-84.
Describes a program intended to help students reflect on, discuss, and evaluate their reading.

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This report on the program in Chicago schools for grades kindergarten - 6 models some viable factors for program evaluation.

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This collection of advice for effective reading programs is based on the premise that there is a need for a balance between literature and "intentional" skills. Articles in the guide encourage reading programs be built on a theoretical base and that administrators be involved in management as well as evaluation of the effect of the program. [A guide for grades *K-2* is also available.]

Block, Cathy Collins (1993). *Teaching the language arts: Expanding thinking through student-centered instruction.* Des Moines, IA: Allyn and Bacon.
This textbook gives a good background in the many considerations of language arts instruction that require a data mix in order to evaluate. It has a final chapter on assessing one's program.

Chance, Cindi (1991, Spring). Principals' perceptions of their involvement in the elementary reading program. *Reading Improvement, 28* (1), 26-34.
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Des Moines Public Schools (1993). *Reading grades K-12; language arts grades K-5. Program evaluation.* Des Moines, IA: Des Moines Public Schools.
This focus on program evaluation in a city's schools models objectives worth considering in evaluating one's program.

Fox, Sharon E. and Allen, Virginia Garibaldi (1983). *The language arts: An integrated approach.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
This guide bridges the gulf between language research and classroom practice while acknowledging that language use needs to be, and is being, studied in natural settings outside the classroom. Includes a chapter on program planning and evaluation.

Glazer Susan Mandel (1994, January). Assessment: Can children assess their own work? *Teaching Pre-K-8, 24* (4), 114-116.
Contends that elementary students can assess what they have learned if assessment is part of the instruction and an appropriate language framework is provided. Sees prediction as a form of self-assessment.

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This extensive consideration of how approaches and teaching styles can be compatible covers numerous approaches and aspects of reading instruction, including evaluation.

Hug, William E. (1992). Trends and issues in school library media programs. *School Library Media Annual (SLMA), 10*, 5-13.

Discusses critical issues in school library media programs, including problems in the profession; building the collection to support the curriculum; resource-based education; literature-based reading programs; conceptual frameworks for new technologies, new kinds of textbooks, and differentiated staffing; professional leadership by administrators and media professionals; and program evaluation.

Koziol, Stephen M. Jr. (1981, 1982). *Communication skills. PCRP assessment and surveys*. Harrisburg, PA: Pennsylvania State Department of Education.

A curriculum review handbook and a series of reports on statewide program evaluation deal with sustained silent reading, language proficiency development, oral composing, and written composing. Each contains numerous evaluation strategies and practical tools for program evaluation.

Lore, Rosemary (1995). *Chapter 1 Reading Program. Final evaluation report 1994-95. Elementary and Secondary Education Act—Chapter 1*. Columbus, OH: Columbus Public Schools, Department of Program Evaluation.

An example of a program evaluation that relies heavily on standardized test scores and how careful analysis of them is fitted to the evaluation of a particular program. This school system continued a factored analysis of its overall reading program over several years.

North Carolina State Department of Public Education (1994). *A guide to quality early childhood and elementary school programs*. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina State Department of Public Education.

This comprehensive 25-page guide has a section on English language arts and is intended "to help schools evaluate their current programs and set goals for continued improvement" in terms of quality indicators based on national and state trends.

Olson, Mary W. and Miller, Samuel (1991). Program evaluation – Part 1. *Reading Psychology*, 12 (3), 281-288.

Describes a framework as a process for determining the value of a reading/language arts program – a model for evaluation.

Pressley, Michael, *et al.* (1992, June). A researcher-educator collaborative interview study of transactional comprehension strategies instruction. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 84* (2), 231-246.

A report on an evaluation of a particular program that was conducted by participating teachers.

Rauch, Sidney J. (1992, May). How to create a lifelong love of reading. *School Administrator, 49* (5), 27-29.

Describes five major steps in evaluating school reading programs: clarifying evaluators' role, data collection, data analysis, data reporting, and follow-up. Includes checklist for measuring motivation, clarification, application, and satisfaction components.

Schumm, Jeanne Shay, *et al.* (1994, January). Literacy instruction for mainstreamed students: What suggestions are provided in basal reading series? *Remedial and Special Education (RASE), 15* (1), 14-20.

An analysis of six basal programs found suggestions for mainstreamed special education students. Suggestions for instruction are offered.

Planning Worksheets

An evaluation of _____

_____

will be conducted in the near future. The study will produce information that can help us strengthen the program and develop better language users in our schools. In planning for this study, we will seek the answers to questions of direct importance to teachers, librarians, parents, and students.

Before settling on what those questions will be, we are seeking your input!

Please take time to think about this project and contribute to its success. What questions do you think need to be asked? Please make a note for each question that explains why getting the answer to that question would be important to you. Thank you very much for your help._____

_____

I believe this question is important:	The answer is important because:
?	!
?	!
?	!

_____ [name]

I am a _____

An evaluation of _____

_____

will be conducted in the near future. The study will produce information that can help us strengthen the program and develop better language users in our schools. In planning for this study, we will seek the answers to questions about the way we are teaching language arts and reading.

We hope to get a great deal of important information from teachers, librarians, parents, and students!

Please take time to think about this project and contribute to its success. What information do you have that will help reveal how well we are doing? Please make a note for each question that explains how you think that information might be collected. _____

_____

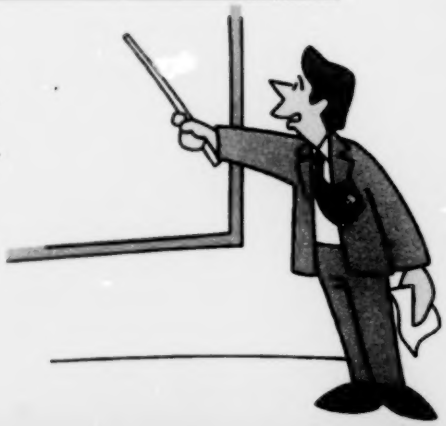
I have this kind of information:	This is how you should collect it:

I am a _____

My name is _____

You can contact me by

_____



Organizing to report on your program evaluation

In _____

the program,_____,

will be evaluated by _____.

A General Finding:	Recommendation:	Rank 1-3

Here are things we learned to report to particular audiences:		Order to use in reporting
What we learned:	Audiences:	

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A Working Document for the Evaluation of

_____

_____ (Page 1)

Question (reference #)	Source(s)	Assessment(s) We Can Use

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A Working Document for the Evaluation of

_____

_____ (Page 2)

Q #	Assessment(s) We Can Use	Who will administer/how?	When?

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